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ABSTRACT

Oral language development, the single most important factor in determining readiness for reading, may be enhanced through creative drama, especially role playing. Role playing is spontaneous play which traditionally has served many purposes, including promoting socialization. It can also be a unique method of recreating historical episodes in which past leaders or events can be brought to life as children assume roles of historical significance. To do this, the teacher selects unfamiliar events from history; the cast role plays their solution to the historical problem; and the teacher then has them consult sources to learn what really happened. Examples may be seen in three problem stories based on factual information which was dramatized to make the episodes more lively and appealing. (JM)

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LIVING HISTORY: USING ROLE-PLAYING IN THE CLASSROOM

By

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It might be possible to prevent all reading failures if teachers would seek the optimum moment for each child before introducing him/her to initial reading instruction. Aside from the child's native intelligence, the single most important factor in determining readiness for reading is the oral language development of the child. Too often in readiness activities we put pencils and crayons into the hands of children and have them mark X's on pictures when we ought to be encouraging them to talk. . .and talk. . .and talk.

There are many methods for developing improved use of oral language--choral speaking, finger-plays, sentence expansion and pattern practice, storytelling, giving directions, show-and-tell, imitative play, and creative dramatics--to name just a few. Creative dramatics is especially versatile, and one form of creative dramatics is role-playing.

Role-playing is spontaneous play, an unrehearsed ending to a problem story in which the dialogue and action of the "play" arise out of the immediate situation and the cast's attempts to solve the problem

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presented in the story. Traditionally role-playing has served many purposes: it has been used to improve oral language usage, increase speech production, introduce social skills, and ameliorate the socialization of children, teens or adults.

PROCEDURES FOR ROLE-PLAYING

When used in the classroom, the procedures for role-playing which a teacher may follow are those generally attributed to Fannie Shaftel (13):

1) Stimulate interest among group members by asking a question or making a relevant comment about the nature of the problem to be explored.

2) Read or tell the problem story, closing with a statement like, "Show us what you think happened next."

3) Lead the group into a brief "warm-up" discussion during which the problem is clearly identified and articulated by the group.

4) Select members of the cast; allow them just 45 to 60 seconds to plan their play, otherwise they will tend to overplan and thus reduce the spontaneity of the production.

5) Role-play.

6) Guide a general discussion, including both the cast and audience, following the production.

7) Say, "Could this problem have been solved any other way?" if the group appears dissatisfied with the solution demonstrated by the cast. Select a new cast or give the first one another chance, and have another role-playing production.

If used to promote <u>socialization</u>, role-playing might be initiated by the use of such problem stories as the three which follow.

I. <u>Objective</u>: To develop social skill.

<u>Story</u>: It was Friday afternoon and Mrs. Hall, Ted's mother, came to school to visit. She knocked on the classroom door. Show us what you think happened next.

Cast: Mrs. Hall, Ted, Teacher, Children

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II. Objective: To provide opportunity to evaluate behavior showing anti-social tendencies.

Story: Madelyn ambled slowly down the street toward the school. She dragged her feet as slowly as possible because she didn't want to go to school.

Madelyn thought she didn't have any friends at school, and she didn't. Madelyn was usually so quarrelsome and rough with the other children that they didn't like to play with her. But Madelyn never thought that this was her fault; she always blamed the other children.

The street down which Madelyn walked to school led right past the city park playground. Today as she passed the park, she stopped, went over to the swings, and sat down in one of them.

She swung back and forth for a while, then she said to herself: I just don't think I'll go to school today. I think I'll spend the day in the park. Show us what you think happened next.

Cast: Madelyn (Others if needed)

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III. Objective: To provide opportunity to evaluate school relations.

Story: It was Friday noon and the school cafeteria was crowded and noisy. Mark nudged Ricky in the ribs with his elbow and nodded at a boy carrying his tray toward their table. "Here comes the jerk. Let's take him on, okay?"

Ricky grinned, "Yeah. You get the brownies, I get the hamburger."

Charles slid his tray into the only vacant place at the table. He

glanced quickly at Ricky and Mark, then picked up his fork.

Mark reached under the table, grabbed Charles' hand and bent back one of his fingers.

Charles winced in pain and gasped, "Awright, you guys, cut it out!" And he tried to inch his chair away from the two boys.

Mark closed in on the right, and Ricky closed in on the left, saying, "You want me to beatcha up after school, Charlie Boy? Now don't give us no problems. Gimme the hamburger like a good little boy and give Mark the brownies--and, no sweat, okay?" What do you think happened next?

Cast: Mark, Ricky, Charles (Others if needed)

ROLE-PLAYING HISTORICAL EPISODES

In addition to its use in improving the socialization of children, role-playing can be a unique method of recreating historical episodes; past leaders or events can be brought to life as children assume roles which have historical significance.

To use role-playing in this manner, the teacher can select rather unfamiliar events from history, turning factual information into dramatic problem stories which stop short of full disclosure. The cast can role-play their solution to the historical "problem", and when they have suggested one way the problem might have been solved, the teacher can have them consult informational sources to find out what actually happened.

The three problem stories which follow are based on factual information from history books, but the facts have been dramatized

to make the episodes more lively and appealing.

I. Objective: To provide opportunity to develop understanding of the presence of blacks during the Revolutionary War period.

Story: Although it was March, and there had been a few spring-like days, the streets of Boston were muddy and icy. A bitter wind whipped in from the sea and added to the growing restlessness that prevailed that spring of 1770.

It was Monday evening and a small group of young lads were wandering the cold streets, looking for a bit of fun. . .or trouble.

"Look, David, there ahead. Some soldiers. Look sharp, now--they've got their cutlasses drawn!"

Benjamin stooped and hefted a chunk of dirty ice. "They come at me, lads, and they'll get something they're not looking for!" He laughed with anticipation. "Think they own Boston, they do. Struttin' and takin' over. Well," said the hot-eyed boy, "they don't own Boston, we do!"

David took Benjamin by the coatsleeve. "Watch it, now. Don't do nothin' rash."

"You, there," shouted the red-coated soldier. "Halt!" And he swished his short sword menacingly.

Benjamin threw the chunk of ice and hit the soldier on the chest. That led the way and other bits of mud and ice began to fly through the air. Then, Benjamin spotted a stout stick under some dirty snow; he yanked it out and began flailing at the soldiers who were shouting to their comrades in the barracks nearby.

Suddenly, things got out of hand. More soldiers ran to the aid of their fellows. More townspeople ran to help the young boys. Swords flourished; sticks whistled and thumped. Someone ran and rang the church bells, sending the alarm to other parts of town.

Soon around the square from Jackson's corner came a seething crowd of angry citizens led by a purposeful black man who was striding along in front. This was not a black man to be fooled with; this was a black man who twenty years before this had fled slavery and his master, William Brown of Framingham.

Waving his arms, the black shouted, "Come on! They dare not fire!" He waved a piece of cordwood and urged the others on. "We'll show 'em, we're not afraid o' no redcoats!"

What do you think happened next?

Cast: David, Benjamin, black man (Crispus Attucks), soldiers, (Others if needed)

History says: That March evening in 1770, the British soldiers fired on the crowd, killing five martyrs to freedom: Samuel Gray, ropemaker; James Caldwell, mate; Samuel Maverick, apprentice joiner; Patrick Carr, an Irishman, and Crispus Attucks, former slave. All five were honored and were buried in a common grave while all the bells of Boston tolled a solemn peal. (Facts from Kaplan, Sidney. The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution, 1770-1800. New York: New York Graphic Society, Ltd., 1973)

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II. Objective: To provide opportunity to develop an awareness of the role of some women during the Civil War.

Story: The rocker on the porch of the Wartrace Hotel was occupied by a pleasant-faced, handsome young woman. She slowly rocked to and fro, fanning herself with a lace handkerchief.

As he trudged up the hotel steps, Mr. Wilberforce lifted his panama hat and greeted her, "Mornin', ma'am. Mighty warm for June, ain't it?"

"Surely is, sir. Surely is." She rocked on and carefully studied each man entering the hotel for the noon meal. Suddenly, she smiled and thought to herself: "Ah. Just the right size. His suit will fit nicely," as a boy of seventeen entered with his father and grandfather.

Miss Pauline Cushman was on her way to Nashville and appeared to be a sweet Southern lady on her way to visit kinfolks. In reality, she was the famous "Woman Scout of the Cumberland," a clever spy always on the lookout for information which she might pass on to Union forces.

At the moment, Pauline needed a disguise, a man's suit of clothes small enough to fit her frame.

She rose from the rocker, smoothing her locks up under the summer bonnet and casually strolled through the hotel's lobby to the desk.

"'Mornin'," she greeted the clerk, "how're y'all? It is so warm it fair takes my breath away." The clerk returned her greeting and began complaining about the hotel's crowded conditions. While he chattered, Pauline noted the names listed in the hotel's register, open on the desk. She saw that three gentlemen of the same last name occupied room 321, a floor above her own room.

Pauline waited in the dark by the window of her second floor room, hoping to catch a cooling breeze on the hot June night. Crickets chirped and some cicadas buzzed insessantly. Gradually, the night sounds grew quiet and Pauline decided the time had come. She slipped stealthily into the hall, then up the wooden stairs to the third floor, quickly located room 321 and tried the door knob. The knob turned, but the door seemed wedged by some heavy object. Pauline guessed that a suitcase had been placed against it to bar the way of intruders.

Very slowly, she pushed harder and harder until, at last, the door opened and she darted inside the darkered room, where she heard the heavy breathing of the sleeping men.

She stood still a moment, heart beating rapidly, scarcely breathing. Finally, her eyes became accustomed to the dark and she saw a pile of clothing on a wooden chair between the room's two large beds. Moving gently, lest her garments rustle and waken the sleeping men, she crept between the beds and felt among the clothing on the chair. She ran her hands over the waistbands of the trousers and across the seams of the shirts and coats, judging their size. When she had what seemed to be the clothing of the smallest size, she tip-toed from the room and left the three occupants snoring into the night.

Back in her own room, she quickly donned the borrowed suit, pushed her hair up under a knitted cap, put her pistol into the band of the trousers, and quietyly closed her hotel room door.

Pauline sped down the back stairs and raced to the stables behind the hotel. There she saddled a chestnut mare and was soon on her way down the moonlit road, heading toward the woods.

Three miles out of Wartrace, she came upon a small rebel encampment. Tying her horse to a tree branch, she slipped among the tall trees and listened to the campfire conversations. It had only been a few minutes when she unluckily stepped upon a brittle twig and gave away her presence. She leaped on the horse and tore through the woods with the sounds of galloping horsemen right behind her. The hoofbeats grew louder and more insistent. Pauline knew they were gaining on her and she turned her horse down a steep bank toward the rushing creek she heard below. The hoofbeats of her persuers slowed and Pauline could tell that they hesitated at the top of the steep bank.

Suddenly, bullets zinged around her, so she urged the mare into the thick brush on the water's edge.

She rode as fast as she was able, twisting, turning, feeling that she must out-distance the rebels above her on the embankment.

Ahead, at the base of a gnarled tree, Pauline glimpsed a dark form. She pulled the horse up short and snatched her pistol from her belt, cocking it to fire.

The dark form moved and groaned. Aiming her pistol, Pauline moved closer. She lowered the gun when the form identified itself as a wounded Union soldier. Knowing the band of rebels was only seconds away, Pauline told the wounded man that she was a woman and gave him her name. The soldier recognized the famous name and when she asked his help with her sly plan, he agreed.

Pauline pointed the gun into the air and fired. Within seconds, the rebels crashed through the brush and surrounded the two "men," one wounded and bleeding on the ground and the other, a young farm boy,

standing over him with a smoking pistol.

What do you think happened next?

Cast: Pauline, wounded Union soldier, rebels

History says: Pauline Cushman, appearing to be a young farm boy, "surrendered" to the rebels, confessing to be a rebel herself who had just shot this Union soldier. So good an actress was she that she convinced the rebel band that she thought them to be Yankees and that she was afraid they would kill her. The band of rebels told her that they, too, were rebels; they took the soldier prisoner and gently placed him on a horse. They insisted that Pauline join them, but as they all rode through the woods in the dark night, she slipped farther and farther behind the group and finally fired five quick shots, making the rebels think themselves ambushed by Federal cavalry. In the confusion, Pauline galloped back to the hotel where, undetected, she returned both the horse and the borrowed clothes. (Facts from Botkin, B. A. A Civil War Treasury of Tales, Legends and Folklore. New York: Random House, 1960)

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III. Objective: To provide opportunity to evaluate Abraham Lincoln's compassion.

Story: Young Billy Scott settled under the tall oak tree, gingerly set his tin plate of beans on his knee, and placed the mug of coffee on a rock beside him. He waved to his friend Jeb--good ole Jeb, his closest friend in Company K, now stationed at Chain Bridge just out of Georgetown.

Jeb crouched on the ground beside Billy.

"You et already, Jeb?"

"Cain't," Jeb said. "My stomach's done took a turn."

Billy looked closely at his friend and noted the pale skin covered with small beads of sweat. "You sick, Jeb?"

The pale boy nodded.

"I'll stand your watch--go on back to the tent."

And with that, William Scott, just turned eighteen and green as grass in army ways, made a decision that sentenced himself to be shot.

All night, William Scott stood picket duty for his sick friend. The next day he fought in two minor skirmishes and that night he, himself, was ordered to sentinel duty. He had been awake for almost 48 hours.

The September night was warm and breezy; woodsmoke drifted through the air. Billy yawned and jerked his head up, trying to keep awake. But, try as he might, Billy could not fight off sleep indefinitely, and at last he closed his eyes. . . .

Someone had him by the shoulder, shaking him like a pup with a coon. "You're under arrest, soldier, for sleeping on duty."

William Scott was quickly court-martialed, found guilty, and sentenced to be shot within 24 hours after his trial.

On the second morning after his arrest, his comrades decided there was only one man on earth who might help Billy--that man was President Lincoln.

Taking bold action, several of the soldiers went to call on Mr. Lincoln in the nation's capital. Billy's captain said:

> He is as brave a boy as there is in your army, sir. Scott is no coward. Our mountains breed no cowards. They are the homes of 30,000 men who voted for

> Abraham Lincoln. They will not be able to see that the best thing to be done with William Scott will be to shoot him like a traitor and bury him like a dog. Oh, Mr. Lincoln, can you?

What do you think happened next?

Cast: President Lincoln, Captain, Others (William Scott, if needed)

History says: Lincoln said, "No, I can't!" However, Lincoln hesitated to anger the men in the regular army who believed in strict enforcement of army rules. He temporarily suspended the sentence and himself went up to Chain Bridge to look into all the details of the case of William Scott, who was only a youth, a boy in his late teens. Lincoln decided against allowing the sentence to be carried out; for this, he presented a "bill" to Scott, who said to the President: ". . .But there is some way to pay you, and I will find it after a little. . ."

Lincoln answered that there was no way to collect money from others to pay the bill, that there was only one way to pay it: ". . .If from this day William Scott does his duty, so that, if I was there when he comes to die, he can look me in the face as he does now, and say, I have kept my promise, and I have done my duty as a soldier, then my debt will be paid. Will you make that promise and try to keep it?"

A year later in March, 1862, Scott was fatally wounded at the battle of Lee's Mills; dying, he said: "If any of you ever have the chance, I wish you would tell President Lincoln that I have never forgotten the kind words he said to me at the Chain Bridge--that I've tried to be a good soldier. . .that I should have paid my whole debt to him if I had lived. . . ." (Facts from Botkin, B. A. A Civil War Treasury of Tales, Legends and Folklore. New York: Random House, 1960)

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